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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2737
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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 3223
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 3417
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MILITARY CONSCRIPTS STILL PROVIDING
"FREE LABOR" TO THOSE WHO CAN CALL THEM

Classified By: Charge Ambassador Richard Miles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) The March 18 edition of Neytralniy Turkmenistan published a presidential decree ordering the call up of 18 year-old men here to fulfill their 18-month military service obligation. Young men can be drafted into the Army, Internal Affairs (MVD), National Security (MNB), Border Service, Migration Service, and Presidential Security.

¶2. (C) On March 18, Political Officer saw a large group of conscripts wearing hard hats and clearing away demolition rubble by hand from a building behind Turkmen State University. A male local employee said that clearing away rubble from a site that will soon be used for new construction is a routine part of compulsory military service and all conscripts can expect to engage in such menial labor. He said that the practice is very common, because it is a way for Turkish construction companies and Turkmen Government officials to save money on construction contract costs, and suggested that both sides end up pocketing the labor costs saved by using this free labor pool.

¶3. (C) When asked about his own military service, the local staffer said that his family had pulled some strings to enable him to do his service in the MVD. He said that serving in the Army was the worst option, since beatings for conscripts were said to be the most frequent, the food was the worst and prospects for routinely engaging in tough physical labor would be the most likely. (NOTE: Military hazing is so prevalent here that Turkmen citizens consider it to be normal, and are somewhat perplexed when Western observers express concern about the issue. END NOTE.) The best options that young people sought, with the help of family connections and bribes, were serving in the MVD or the MNB, because a conscript would be more likely to engage in administrative work in an office, although the staffer had heard that the Border Service "had the best food."

¶4. (C) The staffer could have served in any of the branches, except for Presidential Security, where he said there were height and physical appearance requirements that he could not meet. He said Presidential Security took lots of young men who were athletes or otherwise physically fit. The staffer himself had ultimately served in the MVD, where

he said the beatings had been few, and certainly less frequent than he would have experienced in the army.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Post rarely hears fresh reports about the hazing of conscripts, but if citizens consider hazing to be a standard reality, we are likely to hear about only the most serious or fatal cases. Seeing conscripts clearing away demolition rubble by hand, and frequently observing them repairing roads or engaging in landscape work reiterates the stark reality that they continue to be a ready source of free labor for those in government who want to make use of them.

END COMMENT.

MILES